

Applying Experiential Learning to the Classroom Study of Wine

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Bordelon, Bridget M., "Applying Experiential Learning to the Classroom Study of Wine" (2021). *Travel and Tourism Research Association: Advancing Tourism Research Globally*. 29.
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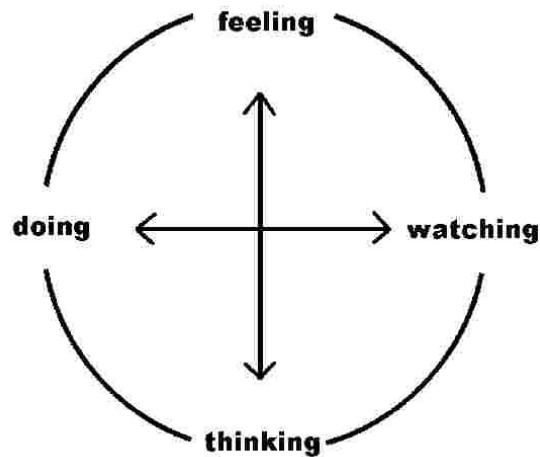
**TTRA 2021 Extended Abstract Template:
Applying Experiential Learning to the Classroom Study of Wine**

Introduction

The wine industry has grown substantially since the 1990s with an increase in the number of people consuming this alcoholic beverage. The global wine market was valued at approximately USD 302.02 billion in 2017 and is expected to generate revenue of around USD, 423.59 billion by the end of 2023, growing at a CAGR of around 5.8% between 2017 and 2023 (International Organization of Vine and Wine, 2018). With increases in consumption, distribution, and awareness, the need for wine education and training in hospitality programs is more important than ever.

Introduction to Wine and *Wines of the World* courses are offered at a number of colleges and universities around the world. Undergraduate and graduate students studying viticulture and enology can take classes in business, plant science, food science and other areas of interest. In the United States, for example University of California-Davis and Cornell University offer two Viticulture and Enology degree programs with hundreds of graduates each year. In Canada, Niagara University offers a graduate certificate the Wine Business Management. Common to all programs is the offering of a for-credit wine education and tasting course. Learning objectives for the course is based on history of winemaking, viticultural regions, vineyard and winery practices, service techniques, and wine flavor perception. In order to be successful, hospitality and tourism graduates must possess a comprehensive understanding of service including food and beverage and in many cases in depth knowledge of beverages. Wine knowledge is an important part of the food service side of the hospitality industry.

The purpose of this research is centered on student based learning and applying experiential learning theory to determine how students develop knowledge of wine in the classroom. Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning states that learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). The implication is for educators to provide opportunities for students to engage in active pursuits of knowledge and learning. Tasting wine in class illustrates the components that determine wine quality as well as the opportunity to explore how students engage in this activity.



Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Continuum

Literature Review

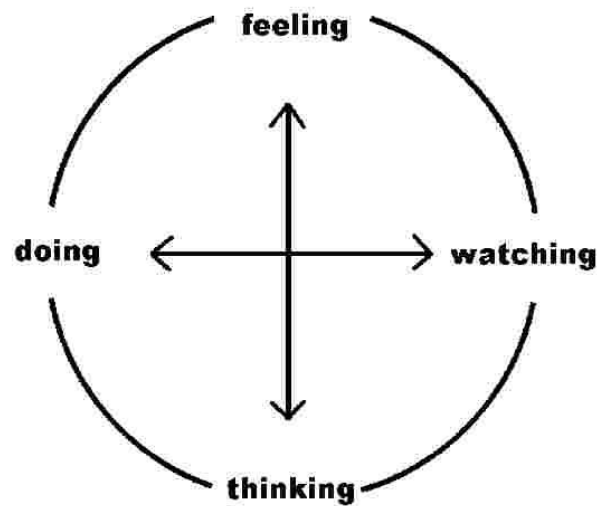
Currently, wine as an academic topic focuses on a vast array of subject areas ranging from sustainability to the exploration of wine tourism motivation. Wine tourism appears to be the most prolific topic in peer-reviewed journals (Bonn et al, 2018).

The motivation of wine tourists are considered an important aspect in the overall understanding of wine regions and expectations of tourists. Previous studies have explored and identified certain factors that motivate wine tourism (Charters and Knight, 2002; Alant and Bruwer, 2002). Hall et al (2000) and Bruwer (2002) identified primary motivation of wine tourists as sampling and buying and peripheral motivation as socializing, learning about wine, and other entertainment. Alant and Bruwer (2004) have determined that both first time visitors and repeat visitors are motivated by the direct interaction, specifically tasting wine.

Escape and relaxation serve as a motivation for many wine tourists. Certain wine regions are increasingly developed along with spas, special events, wellness centers, and other types of entertainment (Getz, 2000). Williams (2001) found that the imagery of wine has shifted from the emphasis on production and related facilities to more aesthetic and experiential focus. Even though natural and cultural amenities are important in wine regions, Bruwer (2003) concluded that brand image and overall attractiveness of wineries are correlated with how visitors perceive the destination.

The importance of wineries to the local economy has also become a significant focus for industry practitioners and academics.

The empirical part of this research explores the following questions: How do college students learn about wine education? Is wine tasting an effective learning tool for hospitality students planning to pursue careers related to food and beverage?



Kolb's (1984) Learning Style

Methodology

In an attempt to understand how Hospitality and Tourism students learn about wine during in class wine tastings, qualitative research methods were selected as the most appropriate research technique. Qualitative research insists that researchers assess each unique situation and select the most effective tools to tap into the bounded phenomenon. Qualitative research uses a wide range of methods to understand or interpret a phenomenon from the perspective of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 1998:3). Because this research topic is unique, it was critical to capture the words, perspectives, and meanings from the students' frame of reference. Data collection consisted of one focus group with seven participant, twenty-seven in-depth interviews with undergraduate and graduate students, and participant observation of a semester long 15 week course meeting once a week for three contact hours. The participant ages range from 21 -39 with all students enrolled in a hospitality and tourism program and having no prior higher education experience with wine (See: Table 1).

Focus Group, In Depth Interviews, and Participant Observation

The focus group was conducted at the mid-point in the semester. Focus groups allow individuals to respond to questions in their own words, enabling researchers to make important connections and obtain deeper meanings. When used early in a research project, focus groups can add valuable insights into the direction of a study (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990:15). This initial preparation increases validity for subsequent interviews. Participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the research project and asked to sign a consent form before joining the 90-minute focus group. After taking notes from the focus group session and analyzing the results, the interview guide was created. This guide provided an opportunity to test certain questions and determine which ones work best for the in-depth interviews (Weiss, 1994). In addition, the interview guide based on general question from the survey of the American Wine Consumer at Sonoma State University's Wine Business Institute. During each interview, the participants were asked a series of open-ended questions related to the Wine course (See: Full Paper).

The researcher conducted direct participant observation and individual extended interviews in order to enhance the data collection. Following the phenomenological tradition, the data analysis was conducted to extract themes and patterns emerging from the focus group and interviews. Because most of the participants had no prior experience with wine tasting or formal wine courses, there was not a challenge of dominant participation in the group.

Results

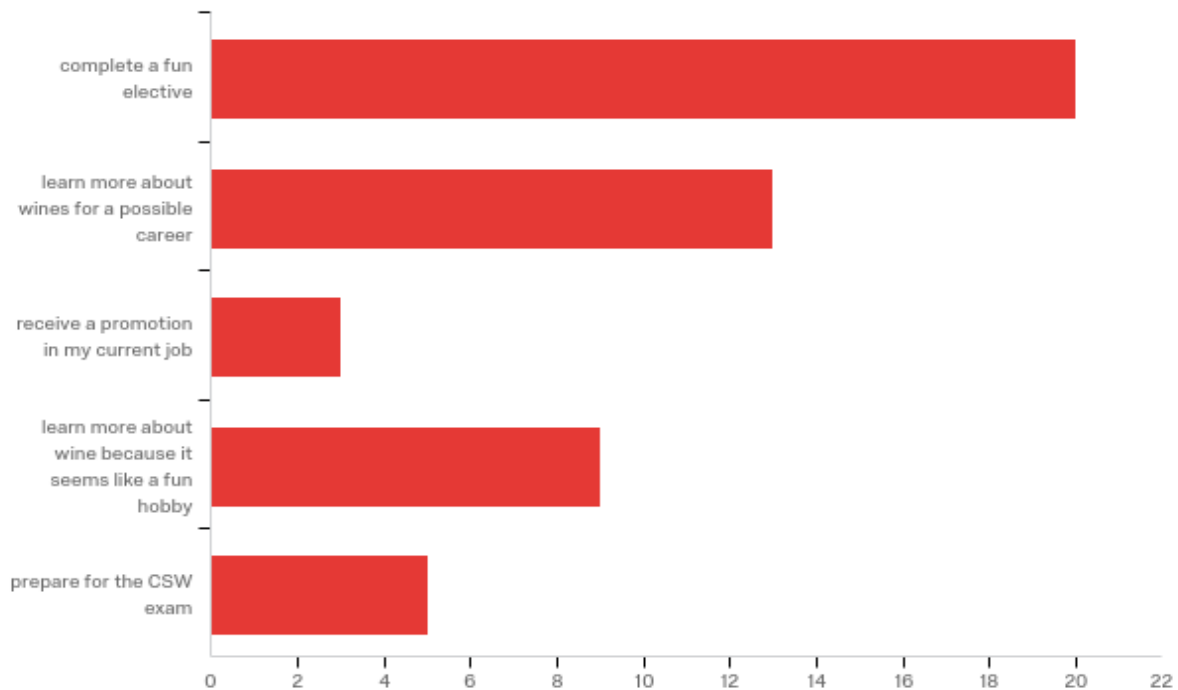
Because many aspects of understanding wine involves sensory analysis, the course includes tasting labs where the students have the opportunity to sample wines discussed in lecture. Each course begins with a lecture designed to encourage student participation and facilitate discussion. At the conclusion of each section of the lecture students discuss and share their thoughts on the subject matter. The focus group was extremely insightful in hearing different perspectives on wine tasting and the value from understanding more.

Several themes were revealed: Confidence, Stereotypes of Wine Drinkers, Appreciation for the Complexity of Wine, Practical Skills, Enjoyment, and Feelings of Reduced Knowledge as the Course Progressed (topics explained and elaborated in full paper). In depth interviews revealed surprising results from several participants about wine knowledge as the class progressed.

One male student commented *"I know that I am learning and I am doing really well on tests and quizzes - I understand so much about geography, wine regions, varietals, but it seems like the more we learn, the less I really know about wine, right?"*

Figure 1: Sample Selection of Open Ended Interview Questions

The reason why I enrolled in the Wines of the World course is to:



Conclusion and Discussion

Using a qualitative methodology to explore the role of learning in wine courses is important for preparing future hospitality and tourism graduates for successful industry careers. Understanding student expectations, learning styles, and classroom techniques can be beneficial for professors to develop efficient and effective best practices. Future studies might explore attitudes about wine before the start of the course and at the conclusion of the semester.

Table 1: Sample Demographic Profile of Participants

Student	Gender	Age	Wine Consumption	NoKnowledge (1) – Wine Expert (5)	Preferred Beverage	Alcoholic
1	Female	30	2-3 times a week	3	Wine	
2	Female	24	4-6 times a week	3	Wine	
3	Female	23	Once a week	3	Hard Seltzer	
4	Female	23	2-3 times a week	3	Spirits	
5	Female	23	2-3 times a week	3	Beer	
6	Female	24	Occasionally throughout the year	3	Spirits	
7	Male	33	2-3 times a week	4	Wine	
8	Male	24	2-3 times a week	3	Beer	
9	Female	23	Once a week		Wine	
10	Male	22	Occasionally throughout the year	3	Wine	
11	Male	26	Once a week	2	Hard Seltzer	
12	Female	21	Occasionally throughout the year	4	Wine	
13	Female	23	Occasionally throughout the year	2	Beer	
14	Male	22	Once a week	3	Beer	
15	Female	21	Occasionally throughout the year	1	Spirits	
16	Male	23	Occasionally throughout the year	2	Spirits	
17	Female	21	2-3 times a week	3	Wine	
18	Male	34	4-6 times a week	4	Spirits	
19	Male	22	Occasionally throughout the year	2	Spirits	
20	Female	22	2-3 times a week	3	Spirits	
21	Male	22	2-3 times a week	4	Beer	
22	Female	23	Once a week	2	Spirits	
23	Male	22	Occasionally throughout the year	2	Beer	
24	Female	39	4-6 times a week	3	Wine	
25	Male	25	Once a week	3	Wine	
26	Male	34	2-3 times a week	2	Wine	

27	Female	22	2-3 times a week	3	Spirits
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